

Glebe House,  
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County,  
New York.

HABS No. 4-203

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District No. 4  
Southern New York State

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,  
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

## THE GLEBE HOUSE

635 Main Street, Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., N.Y.

Location, Date and History

The story of this house begins with the purchase of 87 acres of land for a farm and house for the Rev. John Beardsley, Church of England minister of Trinity Church, Fishkill (which is one of the buildings reviewed in the present survey) and minister also of Christ Church, Poughkeepsie. The minister's farm in old times was called the glebe, and the parsonage (particularly in Ireland) was sometimes called the glebe house. The land bought for this purpose was the Ostrander farm on the Filkintown Road, and the house, built in 1767, generally known as the Flicker house, today bears the number 635 on Main Street, Poughkeepsie. (Hasbrouck, History of Dutchess County, 1909, p. 251.)

The minutes and other contemporary documents of Christ Church Vestry, still fortunately preserved, have been published in a history of the church written by Helen Wilkinson Reynolds, entitled The Records of Christ Church, Poughkeepsie (1911).

A memorandum made by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, concerning the contents of a letter they had received from the Rev. John Beardsley (about 1765) regarding his ministry in Dutchess County, quotes him as saying that the Poughkeepsie communicants "have set about building a Church and are determined to procure 100 acres of land for a Glebe, a decent house & a title of £ 30 sterling, in hopes the Society will be pleased to consider them." (Ibid., p. 13.) Early in 1766, Mr. Beardsley succeeded in raising a sufficient

sum to guarantee the purchase of a glebe. The subscription paper is still in existence. With the sum pledged (about £215), it was possible to make definite application to the Society for aid, which had been promised as soon as the glebe should be purchased. Pending the purchase, a house (the location of which is not known) was rented for Mr. Beardsley.

There was considerable debate between the communicants of Trinity Church, Fishkill, and Christ Church, Poughkeepsie, regarding the selection of a site conveniently near both places. The choice was left to Mr. Beardsley. He decided on Ostrander's farm at Poughkeepsie, and it was accordingly purchased for the two congregations on August 1, 1767. The farm lay on the north side of what is now Main Street, but at that time known as Filkintown Road. (Ibid., pp. 13-25.)

It is clear that the choice of Poughkeepsie was dictated by the promise of its growth as the county-seat, and the land for the glebe lay "near ye heart of ye capital of ye county." Miss Reynolds adds that "The red sandstone, colonial marker is still standing a few feet east of the glebe house," bearing the inscription "1 mile from the Poughkeepsie Court House." The chain of title to the land is described and discussed by Miss Reynolds, who reveals the controversies that arose regarding it, due to unbusinesslike methods of accounting.

"Before the Church came into possession of the Ostrander farm in August, 1767," Miss Reynolds says, "the building of a house had been begun upon it," and Bartholomew Crandell, the

lawyer who had shrewdly managed the purchase, continued to direct the building operations. "Account books and bills of the period show payments for building materials (brick, lime, and heavy timber), from May to November, 1767, and also for brass knob latches, hinges, locks, glass, and other sundries.

"This glebe house is still standing in good repair, although altered in some minor details. Within recent years, the writer went over it, finding the original beams of garret and cellar sound and strong and the 'brass knob latches' of 1767 still in use." (*Ibid.*, pp. 27-30.)

Christ Church was incorporated March 9, 1773, as "The Rector and Inhabitants of Poughkeepsie in Dutchess County in communion of the Church of England as by Law Established," by a patent given by George III of England, which vested in the church the right of a glebe of 87 acres, held by deed of trust, and an additional 200 acres adjoining it, on petition of Rev. John Beardsley and other inhabitants of Poughkeepsie. On May 4, 1792, the corporate name was changed by the Legislature to "Rector and Inhabitants of Poughkeepsie in <sup>communion</sup> ~~commission~~ with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York." (James H. Smith, History of Dutchess County, 1882, p. 420.)

"The purchase of the original glebe was designed for the benefit of the Precincts of Poughkeepsie, New Partners, Beekman, and Rombout [Fishkill], but was completed for the benefit of Poughkeepsie and Rombout Precincts only, with the consent of the other Precincts. It was agreed between Poughkeepsie and Rombout Precincts that the glebe so purchased should ever remain for the use of the rector having the care of the churches

in those Precincts; but in case the congregations should at any time find themselves able to support two rectors, then the church at Poughkeepsie should refund to the church of Rombout, such sum of money as they had advanced both for the purchase of the glebe and the building thereon,...The vestry deeming this agreement 'just and reasonable,' assumed the obligation of fulfilling it. But this arrangement did not, it would seem, meet the views of the Fishkill Church, and the minutes of several succeeding meetings are burdened with efforts to adjust the difference." (Ibid.)

During the Revolution, the Rev. Mr. Beardsley, being a Royalist, was removed ( "banished", as he wrote in a letter to a friend) to New York City on December 14, 1777, to remain during its occupation by the British. (Reynolds, p.59.) For those six years and more, Christ Church had no regular pastor, but on June 20 and 24, 1784, services were conducted by the Rev. Henry Van Dyck; and later, by agreement with the congregation of Trinity Church, Fishkill, which claimed title to half the glebe, the Rev. Mr. Van Dyck was called to be the minister of both churches, when ordained to preach. He was engaged to preach at Poughkeepsie two-thirds of the year and at Fishkill the other third. Christ Church agreed to pay him £ 80 New York currency, per annum, part in cash and part in firewood; and the Fishkill church £ 40. In addition he was to have the use of the glebe so long as he remained "their teacher." Mr. Van Dyck was ordained September 16, 1785, but, the agreement was inoperative owing to his liability under the State laws for trespass for debt. Another agreement, dated November 21, 1786, with substantially

the same terms, was entered into, providing, however, that his services were to be equally divided between the two churches, and he assumed his duties as rector on May 27, 1787. (Smith, p. 421.)

When the Rev. Mr. Beardsley suffered "banishment" in 1777 for his loyalty to King George III, John Davis, a member of the vestry, entered upon and took possession of the glebe with the consent of the vestry. (Reynolds, pp. 52-53, citing the Vestry Minutes.) He lived there until March 14, 1780. The house was then offered for rental. (Ibid., p. 59.) Col. Andrew Bostwick, Deputy Foragemaster-General of the American Army, occupied it from April 13, 1780, to November 12, 1783; and was succeeded by Col. Udney Hay, Assistant Deputy Quartermaster General, from Nov. 20, 1783, to April 20, 1784. (Ibid., p. 60.) Later tenants were John P. Vemont, Zopher Weeks, and finally the Rev. Henry Van Dyck, for whose benefit the place had been farmed, and who took possession as rector in May, 1787. He remained the occupant of the glebe house until the spring of 1791, when the house and a few adjoining acres were leased to Christian Forrey; and he remained tenant until the autumn of 1792.

On November 4, that year, the Corporation of the Church sold the house and about 250 acres of land to John and Andrew Dunn, under a mortgage of £1000. The Dunns failed to meet their obligation to pay half the principal of the mortgage on July 1, 1793, and left Poughkeepsie. The place was therefore rented again, and occupied for 16 months by William Davis. On July 22, 1795, an auction was held and the glebe sold for

£ 1000, to Nathaniel Bosworth, who transferred the purchase to Peter DeRiemer. The latter completed the payments. (Ibid., 85, 86, 88, 89.)

The house has been in private ownership since then until 1929, when it was purchased for the city of Poughkeepsie. It is the purpose now to hold it as a public museum and maintain it as an example of a typical 18th century dwelling.

#### Architectural Observations

The builders of the Glebe House adhered to an early style in design made familiar in stone and wood, - walls a story and a half high and the roof of a single slant. For materials they used stone for the rear wall and brick for the front and ends. (See Reynolds, Dutch Homes in the Hudson Valley before 1776, 1929, p. 323.)

Various minor alterations have been made to the house both on the exterior and interior. The ~~one~~ story wing toward the east is entirely a recent addition. Undoubtedly the ~~steps~~ at the little front porch originally descended straight on the axis of the door but with the widening of streets and sidewalks it became necessary to move them to one side. A very bad dormer was added to the north roof.

It is interesting to see the wood portion at the rear carried under the same roof slope without a break at the masonry walls which was frequently the way of handling the lean-to. While Miss Reynolds states that this rear wall is of stone, it seems doubtful if the stone wall at the end of the

southwest room was the rear wall for any great length of time, although the joints in the front brick wall would seem to indicate that the first part was only one room wide the additions must have been built very soon afterwards.

The brick-work, laid partly in English bond, and part in Flemish, is particularly fine.

On the interior some of the panelling and woodwork has been restored recently, but lack of funds has delayed complete restoration. (From field notes of the architects of the present survey.)

Written, June 2, 1934, by

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